

WELCOME ABOARD

Congratulations on your orders to Marine Safety Office Valdez, AK. This is not designed to be all-inclusive, but instead, to get you started thinking and to give you ideas on subjects you should discuss with your sponsor.

Marine Safety Office Valdez is a multi-mission. The MSO is billeted for 43 personnel (6 commissioned, 2 warrant, 35 enlisted, 1 civilian) and is organized into four departments

The **Marine Safety Department** ensures the safety of the maritime community and protects the marine environment through training and education and by enforcing applicable federal regulations. The primary missions of the department include: Commercial Vessel Safety, Marine Environmental Response, Port Safety/Security, Pollution Prevention, and Marine Investigations.

The **Vessel Traffic Service** consists of the Vessel Traffic Center, Communications Center, and Electronics Division. Manned 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week, the primary responsibility of the department is to prevent accidents, loss of life, and damage to the environment. The department provides waterways management for vessels transiting Prince William Sound. The VTC coordinates vessel movements through the collection, verification, organization, and dissemination of information obtained by radar surveillance, telecommunications, and an Automated Information System(AIS).

The **Public Works Department** oversees and maintains Coast Guard owned facilities and equipment which includes: the main MSO office building and BEQ, 30 family housing units, community center, garage/workshop, woodworking shop, 4 VTS radar and equipment sites, and three pieces of heavy equipment. The department completed renovation of 23 of 28 housing units and oversaw procurement of two single-family homes in 1996. The department operates and maintains boilers at each building, generators at 5 locations, and is responsible for snow removal during the winter months.

The **Administration Department** provides support for Coast Guard personnel. The department consists of 1 yeoman, 1 storekeeper, 2 Food Preparation Specialists, and 1 RSM (TC) for computer maintenance. The galley prepares 3 meals a day, 5 days a week and is open on the weekends for use by BEQ residents and duty personnel.

The **Uniform of the Day** here in Alaska is Tropical Blue Long from 1 April to Mid October and is optional for the remainder of the year. Service Dress Blue Bravo is an optional winter uniform unless otherwise prescribed. There are no uniform items available here in the state, although mail order through Cape May provides very good service. Discuss uniforms with your sponsor to determine which items you will need depending on your department.

Important Phone Numbers

Executive Officer	907-835-7211
Administration	835 -7202
Vessel Traffic Center	835-7205
Marine Safety	835-7223
Public Works	835-7236

Valdez – The City of Valdez is located on Port Valdez at the northern end of Prince William Sound. Located at sea level the city is surrounded by the 5-6000 ft. mountains of the Chugach Mountain Range. Valdez was established in 1897 as a port-of-entry for gold miners in route to the Klondike goldfields. Valdez has since developed into the northern most ice-free port in North America. Since the completion of the Trans Alaska Pipeline in 1977 approximately 25% of the oil produced in the United States flows to Valdez and is shipped south in tankers. Valdez, population approximately 4000, derives much of it's income from oil related industry, commercial, fishing, and tourism. The population grows to as much as 10,000 in the summer as tourists arrive for sport fishing and a wide variety of other outdoor activities. Sixty to eighty cruise ships visit each summer and daily 8-12 tour boats along with float planes and helicopters provide tours of Prince William Sound and the surrounding area.

Access to Valdez – Your arrival in Valdez can be by car via the ALCAN Highway, by car via the Alaska Marine Highway, or by air sending your vehicle up by ship or barge.

The **ALCAN Highway**, Seattle, WA to Valdez (2380 miles), or Great Falls, MT to Valdez (2432 miles) is quite the experience. Plan 8 or more days travel (it can be driven faster, but the Coast Guard allows 8 days) for either route. The ALCAN travels through some beautiful but remote country and a little prior planning is required.

The **Alaska Marine Highway** departs Bellingham, WA by ferry and travels the Inside Passage to either Haines, AK or into Valdez. From Haines, you will have to drive the remaining 700 miles to Valdez, part of which is through parts of Canada. Travel by ferry allows you to see places like Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka, and Juneau. Advance reservations are required and should be made as early as possible after obtaining entry approval form D17 by calling the Alaska Marine Highway at 1-800-642-0066.

Travel by Air, for those who are not quite so adventurous, or who are in a rush to get to Valdez, is available. The 45-minute Anchorage to Valdez flight is offered 5 times a day (3 per day during the winter). This short flight utilizes Convair 580s or DeHavaland Dash 8s. The flight time from Seattle, WA to Anchorage, AK is about 3 ½ hours and is offered by several major carriers. Your vehicle will be shipped from Seattle to Anchorage, and is normally a 1 to 4 week wait depending on their schedule and how busy the shippers are.

Alaska Roads – All of the major highways in Alaska are open year-round. This includes the Richardson Highway into Valdez. All of the major highways are 2 lanes and are paved. Due to highway improvements and damage to the roads incurred each winter, you will encounter road construction and stretches of gravel road. 40 – 60% of the vehicles in Alaska are four-wheel-drive, but this is not required. Four-wheel-drive does come in handy if you intend to get off the beaten path and for winter driving, but again is not required. During the winter months, most but not all vehicles run studded tires. Not having studs or four-wheel-drive will limit, and require extra planning for, out of town trips during the winter.

The Mile Post – You should receive a copy of the Mile Post from D17 after you receive your orders. If you plan to drive, it is by far the best planing guide you can obtain. Study it. It lists every road in the state, and the routes through Canada. It lists every gas station, motel,

restaurant, scenic view, tourist attraction, road construction site, and, most of the potholes along each route. It also lists every campground, picnic area, fishing hole, and wildlife viewing area. Spend some time planning and you will have a much more enjoyable trip.

Travel through Canada – Both the ALCAN Highway and the Alaska Marine Highway require travel through Canada. When traveling through Canada, you should carry birth certificates, photo id, valid driver's license, proof of liability insurance, vaccination certificates for all pets. Revolvers, pistols, semiautomatic weapons, and hollow point ammunition **MAY NOT BE TRANSPORTED THROUGH CANADA**. Rifles and shotguns may be transported, but must be declared at the border prior to entry into Canada. For other restrictions, consult the Mile Post.

Valdez Ferries – The Alaska Marine Highway has started ferry service between Bellingham, WA and Valdez. This service has only been available for a few months now and is a possible option. When calling to make reservations, ask about the option of traveling by ferry through to Valdez. If that schedule does not meet your travel requirements, you will need to utilize the ferry between Bellingham, WA and Haines, AK and then drive the final 700 miles to Valdez. There is ferry travel available between Valdez and Cordova and Whittier, and weekly sailings to Kodiak and points further west. During the winter months, sailings are 2 or 3 per week to Cordova.

Climate – The weather in Valdez is quite unique, cooled in the summer and warmed in the winter by the waters of Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska. Record temperatures were 86 degrees in June 1997 and –20 degrees in January 1972. Average daily temperatures range from a high of 61 and a low of 46 during the month of July to a high of 30 and a low of 20 during the month of January. The average annual snowfall is 303 inches (25 ft.) with a record of 546 inches in 1994. Summer months tend to be a bit rainy. The shortest day of the year is 24 December with 5 hours and 27 minutes between sunrise and sunset. The longest day is 21 June with 19 hours and 20 minutes of daylight. Winds in the fall and winter will occasionally reach 40 mph with higher gusts. On rare occasions, high winds and low temperatures will combine to bring the wind chill factor down as low as –50 degrees. Temperatures in the Alaska interior are much colder than in Valdez, remaining well below 0 degrees for several months during the winter. This includes Fairbanks and much of the highway between Valdez and Anchorage. During the summer months, these same areas will commonly reach the 80s and 90s. For winter wear, high quality outerwear capable of being worn in layers, is highly recommended. Product names such as Gore-Tex, Polartec, and Thinsulate are pricey, but excellent if you anticipate a great deal of outdoor activity. Winter attire is available locally on a limited basis and in Anchorage. It can also be purchased in most areas of the lower 48 at substantial savings. It is also available by mail order once you arrive. A good set of rain gear is recommended for the summer months. Talk with your sponsor to determine what you will need and when, and how you want to buy it.

Housing – The Coast Guard owns 28 townhouses, consisting of 7 units with 4 houses each. They are located on a quiet u-shaped street in the northwest corner of town. These include four 2 bdrm 1 ½ bath homes, nineteen 3 bdrm 1 ½ bath homes, and five 4 bdrm 2 bath homes. Each home has the living room, dining room, kitchen, utility room, half or full bath and a snow porch downstairs. The bedrooms and a full bath are located upstairs. Each home has a heated 6 ft x 8 ft storeroom within 50 feet of the front door, and additional storage behind the upstairs and downstairs bathrooms. Each home is equipped with a refrigerator, stove, dishwasher, washer,

and dryer. Each has a carport for one vehicle, and uncovered parking for additional vehicles. Centrally located at housing is a grass playground area and covered picnic area. Also located at housing are the woodworking shop and Longhouse (a community activity building with a meeting room, kitchen, and a small gym facility). Housing is located within 2 miles of downtown, and the main MSO building, ½ mile of the Elementary School, and 4 blocks of the Jr. and Sr. High Schools. The BEQ is located in the MSO building and has 8 rooms for single personnel. The Coast Guard also has two 3 bdrm single family homes out in town, presently occupied by the CO and XO. Contact the Housing Officer for info on housing availability or the prospects of living outside housing.

Temporary Housing – If when you arrive, your housing unit is not ready or your household goods have not arrived, you may need temporary lodging. Accommodations should include a room with cooking facilities. In order to qualify for full TLA, kitchen utensils, dishes, tableware, along with some basic household should be sent in your express shipment. Determine early if you will need lodging and work with your sponsor and the Housing Officer to reserve a place to stay. Valdez has at least 4 motels, 45 bed and breakfasts, and 7 campgrounds and RV parks. Most make their money during the summer tourist season and fill up fast, reservations are required. Prompt filing of travel claims is required in order to receive timely TLA payments. Household goods shipments generally take 3-6 weeks. If you have room, bring some basics, especially if you have children. Items like toys, games, videos and a VCR will come in very handy if you get stuck in a motel for an extended period of time.

Schools – Valdez has one High School (9 – 12), one Jr. High (7 – 8) and one elementary School (K – 6). We have one full service daycare (limited enrollment) and one cooperative daycare. Some opportunities for daycare exist within the Coast Guard Community. Valdez is also home of the fourth largest college in the state (by enrollment, don't plan on any advanced degrees), Prince William Sound Community College. You should hand carry birth certificates and shot records. These items and a school physical are required for all schools, and most daycare centers.

Medical/Dental – Valdez has a small hospital, medical clinic, and two dentists. Medical care is by contract for military members and by TRICARE Standard for dependents. Referrals may be made to military facilities in Anchorage with dependents on a space available basis. A supplemental policy and enrollment in the dependent's dental plan is strongly encouraged.

The Town of Valdez – Valdez has 14 churches, 8 restaurants, 4 motels and 35+ Bed and Breakfasts. We have two grocery stores, 1 is a full-size, full-service store like you are accustomed to, the other is small, but expanding and sells in bulk at a small savings like a Sam's Club or Costco. We have 4 gas stations (Texaco and Tesoro), gas runs around \$1.54 on average. We have 3 fairly well stocked hardware stores and 2 fair construction grade lumberyards. CLOTHING IS MORE LIMITED; one small summer only store: one small year round store that is rumored to be going out of business; and one outfitter that sells anything you should ever want to wear OUTDOORS. There are 2 small sports stores, one pharmacy, and a NAPA auto parts store. Tourist shops abound. Children's clothes and toys are extremely limited. You will learn to shop mail order or shop in Anchorage. There are two full service banks in town: First National Bank of Anchorage and National Bank of Alaska. There is a post office, but no home mail delivery. You must apply for a Post Office Box. UPS will deliver incoming packages only, Federal Express has incoming and outgoing services.

COLA Yes, it does cost more to live here in Alaska. Shipping is the main reason costs go up. Items that are perishable, heavy or large tend to cost more. Overall, costs are about 25% more than you are accustomed to. It is recommended that you check out the per diem information on the Coast Guard Web Page for current COLA amounts for the Valdez area.

Anchorage and Fairbanks – We do a lot of our shopping in Anchorage, and to a lesser extent, Fairbanks. Both cities are accessible by road year-round, although the winter driving will require a little additional planning and weather watching.

Anchorage, population 258,000, is located 310 highway miles to the northwest of Valdez. It is much like any city of comparable size, with just a bit of fonder spirit. Anchorage offers an endless variety of activities and shopping opportunities making it an excellent 3 day weekend getaway destination. Activities include all types of outdoor activities, concerts, the Alaska State Fair, and unique events like Fur Rendezvous (a 9 day winter fair with a frontier theme), and the Iditarod Dogsled Race. Shopping includes most major retailers you would find down south, including: Sears, J.C. Penney, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Eagle Hardware, Sam's Club, and Costco. Anchorage also has all major automobile dealerships and service centers. Elemendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson offer commissary and exchange shopping. Both offer low cost temporary quarters and both are within 5 miles of downtown Anchorage.

Fairbanks, population 85,000, is located 354 miles north of Valdez. Fairbanks is a modern city with a rich gold mining history. Fairbanks offers many activities and shopping on a slightly lesser scale than Anchorage. Fort Wainwright and the smaller Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks along with Fort Greely along the route to Fairbanks offer exchange and commissary shopping.

Prices in Anchorage and Fairbanks tend to be lower than Valdez, and a large shopping trip once every 2 or 3 months will offset the expense of gas and lodging for a 1 or 2 night trip.

Activities In and Around Valdez

Limited fishing can be had almost year-round, but most is done during the summer. Pink Salmon in July and Silver Salmon in August can be caught right off the beaches here in Port Valdez, even by novice anglers. King Salmon and Red Salmon are caught on the riverbanks about 95 miles north of town from late June to early August. Pinks, Silvers, and Reds run 3 – 19 pounds, Kings run 20 – 65 pounds and larger in some of the other rivers. Out in Prince William Sound by boat, Pacific Halibut, Rockfish, Cod and more Salmon are caught. Halibut run 30- 465 pounds with 75 – 200 pounders being fairly common. Rockfish and Cod go 3- 25 pounds. Charter boats run up to \$145 for a full day charter, but can be had for less. Up in the mountain and interior lakes and streams Grayling (1 – 3 pounds) and various Trout (to 40 pounds) can be caught. Dolly Varden frequent local streams and the port nearly year-round. Remote fly-in fishing trips are available throughout the state. Fishing licenses run \$15 plus \$120 the first year, \$10 there after for a King Salmon Stamp if you want to fish Kings.

Hunting for moose, caribou, black bear, brown/grizzly bear and deer is quite common. Hunting for mountain goats, dall sheep, wolf, wolverine, and small game including fox is also available. Limited hunts for musk ox, bison, and elk are held on a drawing permit basis. For birders, Ptarmigan and grouse hunts run August – May in most areas and geese and

ducks are plentiful each fall here in town. Depending on the time of year, hunting access may be by automobile, 4 or 6 wheel ATV, boat, snowmobile, fly-in or foot. You must be here 1 year prior to the start of a hunt to qualify as a resident. Resident licenses are \$25 plus \$25 for a brown/grizzly bear tag. Non-resident (if you just can't wait a year) is \$85 plus \$500 and a guide for a brown/grizzly bear, \$400 for moose, \$325 for caribou, \$225 for a black bear, etc., etc., etc. A combination hunting and fishing license after your first year is only \$40. Moose season starts 1 August in some areas, the rest vary, but no later than late July makes a good reporting date if you intend to hunt while you are here. Early June is better if you like to fish.

Wildlife Viewing – Not everyone hunts, but the nature photography opportunities are endless here in Alaska. Most all of the big game species can be found year-round, with some being easier to find in the winter. Moose frequent downtown Anchorage all winter long. Hundreds of Bald Eagles visit Valdez during the spring, summer, and fall for the herring and salmon runs. Many eagles are full-time residents with one pair nesting within ½ mile of housing. There is a sea gull rookery in Mineral Creek, just yards from housing. See otters live in Port Valdez, while seals, sea lions, and killer whales sometimes visit. Seals, sea lions, killer whales and porpoises are full-time residents of Prince William Sound. Grey and humpback whales feed in the sound during the summer months.

Winter Activities – Valdez has several miles of groomed ski trails that pass within yards of housing. Anchorage and Fairbanks have ski resorts with lifts. Within a few miles of Valdez several areas offer snowboarding and downhill skiing using snow machines for access or by walking or by working the areas between turns in the highway. Several outfitters offer large tracked vehicles or fly-ski tips. Snowmobiles are quite popular throughout the state. Snowmobile clubs frequently hold organized cross-country events. Valdez is host to the World Extreme Skiing Championships each April. 15 – 25 of the world's best skiers gather to challenge 6000 foot mountains from a helicopter. Other events include a snowboarding contest and snowmobile hill climbs. These events draw 100s of spectators from all over the world to Valdez for 2 – 3 weeks.

Other Activities – Valdez offers hiking and camping during the spring, summer and fall, snowshoeing during the winter and spring. It also offers softball, basketball and dart leagues, and an occasional pool tournament. The high school has a pool that is open for swimming during limited hours each week and there is a small gym at the community college. We have **NO** bowling alley, golf course or movie theater. The Civic Center shows one movie, 3 – 5 viewings each weekend during the school year. There are two movie rental outlets, and cable TV or satellite TV is available. We have two AM radio stations and two weekly newspapers here in town, with the Anchorage paper delivered each day. Hobbies and crafts are limited and we have one small sewing center. The climate allows for some gardening, primarily flowers, and some items grow better than others with the 19 hours of daylight during the summer. Some wood is available, but as with many items, you are sometimes better off putting these items on your next Anchorage shopping list.

Morale – The Coast Guard has a fully equipped woodworking shop and after qualifying on the equipment, you can use the shop weekends and after working hours for your own projects. The public works garage is also open to use after working hours. The morale committee has a limited amount of camping, fishing, and snow ski equipment you can use.

We also have a well equipped 25 foot Bayliner. After qualification, it may be reserved for fishing and sight seeing for \$15 per day plus gas.

As I stated at the beginning, it is very hard to explain everything that you need to know on how to get here and what life will be like once you have arrived. Get in touch with your sponsor, and if married, have your spouse call your sponsor's spouse. This letter is intended to be a starting point for planning what should be a highly rewarding tour here in Valdez.